OPENING ADDRESS OF THE SECTION OF ARCHITECTURE AT THE LEWES MEETING.[1]

By J. T. MICKLETHWAITE, F.S.A.

These meetings which we hold year by year in different parts of the country are not simply for our own instruction. We do indeed learn much by them, but if that were our only end it would be better to travel more privately and in smaller parties. We come as we do that we may interest others in what interests us. We wish to spread the study of archæology, partly because we hold it to be a good thing for men to know something of what has been before them, and partly because the more the men who do so, the less is the likelihood of objects of archæological value being destroyed or allowed to perish for want of a helping hand from one who knows their worth.

It is our custom to divide our work into three sections; and of these that of *architecture*, over which I have the honour to preside this year, seems to call for our missionary efforts even more than the others. It differs from them in that its subject is a fine art as well as matter for historical study. And it is most important to understand well and clearly the difference between the artistic and the historical side of architecture. Much harm has come to our old buildings from the confounding of them. A man cannot properly read the record of an old building without having some appreciation of its art qualities; but the converse is not true, and there are men whom we respect as architects or critics, whilst we are obliged to condemn what they do or recommend in their dealing with old work.

Next after actual writing we have in nothing so complete a record of the past as in its buildings. They are as it

[1] Read at Lewes, August 2, 1883.

were history crystallized. Every age has built to suit its own wants and tastes, and we can learn of them from what is left. A building long in use has to tell us not of its first builders only, but of them who have used it all through its being. Domestic buildings tell us of the home life, and public buildings of the common life of those who inhabited them. The latter, being generally more lasting and less subject to change than the others, have more to tell us, and, of them, those consecrated to religious use have most of all. Here in England the only really public buildings of great age which we have are are our churches. But what a history is theirs! Beginning even before England was England, they have passed through their good times and their bad times, and are still in full life, and, in truth, more vigorous now than they have been for centuries. The contemporary of fifty generations has much to tell us. How, then, shall we bear with patience those who erase the old and forge new until they leave nothing but a blurred and falsified record of one period only! That, however, is the ideal of the "restorers," even of those who make their boast that they are "conservative," and if they have seldom quite reached it, it is because the record of the churches is so much a part of their very being that it cannot be altogether taken from them except by demolition.

But "restoration," bad as it is, is part of the history of the buildings. It is the chapter added in our own time. Their whole story is made up of changes, and what gives them their greatest interest is the fact that each generation of users has "improved" them for good or evil according to its own ideas. And in a living body this must go on. The great church revival of our time must needs show itself in the fabric, and it is useless for us to attempt to prevent it, even if we wished. But no true antiquary would desire to stop the life of a still living building. What we can and ought to do is to teach men how to value the old, and how to record the history of their own time without obliterating that of times past.

Forty years ago the buildings were in a condition which can only be described as indecent, and the revival of life within the church herself could not but produce some change in them. But that change need not have taken

the form which is called "restoration." That it did so is due to the contemporary revival of the study of our old architecture, which study was quickly carried to the furthest ends of the land by the archæological and architectural societies. The societies taught men to know something about the churches, and to distinguish in detail between, for instance, work of the thirteenth century, and that of the fifteenth. But the knowledge was very imperfect, and the zeal of those who were showing the architectural merits of our neglected national buildings, and were striving to bring back the old style into actual use, too often made them regard as of no value everything which was not of their favourite style, and even sometimes every thing which was not of the particular form of the style which they held to be the best. Thus grew the idea of "restoration" as we know it. In putting a church in order, men aimed at making it a good specimen of what they called its "period," not knowing that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the church dates back far further than its history can be traced, and forgetting that modern imitation of old work cannot belong to any "period" at all except that which produces it.

We may admit that, looked at ecclesiastically, churches are now in a better state than they were. But even those which have passed through the hands of good architects have lost greatly in value, and the much larger number, less fortunate, are mere wrecks. Now I contend that the improvement might have been made, and in future may be made, without the mischief for which, I repeat, the societies are chiefly responsible. There have always been a few amongst us who have known better, and the societies are not directly to blame for the worst barbarisms; but they have popularised the doctrine of "Restoration," which, as interpreted by ignorant pretenders, has led to the deplorable results which we see. We need not be ashamed to confess our share in producing the evil, and the very magnitude of it may encourage us in attempting to stay it. The societies have raised the restoration fiend and they must lay him.

The adaptation of the churches to the needs of each generation of users is their very life, and if it be properly done, it will still, as it has aforetime, add to their value.

We cannot, even if we would, stop history but we may do much to guide it. We must recognise the fact that even the worst of "restorations" generally come of a good motive. Parsons and churchwardens are not often mere barbarians bent on the destruction of the building in their charge simply for mischief's sake. Their wish is to make them more fit for their high purpose; and, if they do harm, it is because they know no better, and those to whom they look for advice give them that which is worse than none. They "restore" the churches because they have been taught by precept and example that such is the proper treatment for them; and, if we can teach them a more excellent way, I believe that they will be as ready to follow it. Whereas if we only rail indiscriminately at all alterations in old churches we shall gain no hearing from their guardians.

The first lesson to be taught men is that their duty towards an old church is not to "restore" but to preserve it. And this will generally best be done by shewing them how it came to be what it is; how it grew from a perhaps much smaller building till it came to be what they now see; how each successive addition and alteration had a distinct use and meaning, and, however the pedantical advocate of "period" may jeer at it as disfigurement or an innovation, is generally an improvement to the building.

Next shew them that the building being many centuries old the marks of age which it bears upon it are not defects but honourable scars. Taking only the aesthetic view the appearance of venerable age is far more pleasing than that of smart and shiny newness which the average "restorer" would put in its place. Defects which affect the soundness of the fabric must be made good; for both the present and the future use of the church require that it shall be kept in a state of sound repair. The maintenance or recovery of robust health are very different from a false and superficial affectation of youth. Judicious and necessary repairs will neither lessen nor falsify the church's record. But repairs which aim at bringing it back to the state which somebody thinks it was in at some particular date in its past, are neither judicious nor necessary. As changes of old always had a distinct end in view, either practical or aesthetic, so

should it be with ours. We do no harm in *adding* whatever our convenience or our present sense of ecclesiastical decency may call for, provided that it be good of its sort, and make no pretension to be otherwise than what it is. And ancient objects of furniture whose use still remains may and ought to be repaired if they need it. An old font for example may properly receive a new lining or a cover. But objects whose use is obsolete—an Easter sepulchre for instance—should never be touched except to preserve them from further harm than has already befallen them. The like too of tombs and monuments which have no practical use. These things belong to the past. Their record is done, and to "restore" them will only obscure or falsify it, and can not add to the convenience, and will certainly take off from the architectural effect of the building.

Our forefathers had not learned the historical value of buildings, and seldom hesitated to pull down older work to make way for that of their own time, which they believed to be better. We, however, who have learned it, must be careful in adding our chapter not to erase former ones. Many works of the eighteenth century, and, perhaps, more of the nineteenth, both disfigure the churches and interfere with their proper use, but I would not have the record of even these entirely done away. Side galleries and box-pews are degradations which we may be well rid of. But the fact that such things have been is not without its interest in the history of the church; although its nearness to our own time makes it seem the less important to us. A hundred years hence it will be difficult for men to understand how vast is the change which is being made in the second half of this century. And they, who now press forward the improved state of things, will do well to leave some evidence of what they have effected, even if they can regard it only as a trophy of victory.

But I believe that at no date has everything been absolutely bad. In the seventeenth century, and later still, our churches received much, which served well both for their use and ornament, yet for years our "restorers" have been destroying these things, often putting very mean substitutes in their places, and for no better reason

than that they are not "gothic." Now, it cannot be too often repeated that it is not the architectural style of a thing, but its fitness to its place and purpose by which it should be judged. And, at any rate, a carved oak pulpit or screen of the time of Charles I. is in every sense nearer to the work of the middle ages than is a trumpery Caen stone or varnished pine affair of the time of Queen Victoria, however "gothic" it may be.

Some men, too, have destroyed things for polemical reasons which I cannot discuss here. But I would hint that a man may renounce Lord Penzance and all his works without taking away the board upon which his forefathers, of the time of Charles II. or Queen Anne, painted the Royal Arms as a witness of their loyalty to the Constitution; and so too of some things in the opposite direction.

Men must also be taught not to despise fragments. Many a scrap, which of itself seems almost worthless, is most important to the history of the building to which it belongs, and the more precious as a fragment because it may be all that is left of an otherwise lost chapter. And there is another reason why such should be respected. I have said that the only safeguard for an old building is to teach its guardians to understand and value it. And a bit of old painted glass or sculpture, for example, which the general antiquary may regard lightly because he has seen better elsewhere, has a teaching power impossible to be overestimated. It is not enough for us to write books and papers. If we wish to make the lesson remain, we must show examples, and examples near at hand, which men can study at their leisure. It is but empty talk to the many when we tell how the workers of old went on ever changing their style, first for the better, as the gathering experience of generations taught them more and more to know their material and their power over it, and then for the worse, when in the pride of craftsmanship they thought more of the technical than of the artistic qualities of their work, and both sank together for want of the wholesome goad of a noble aim, until the very art itself was lost. But let a man find in his own parish church what is described in the book, and the words have a meaning. The bit of glass, or whatever it may be, there at home in its place and doing the work that it was from the first

intended to do, will teach more and give more real pleasure than can ever be got out of the like piece stowed away in the museum of a great town, even to one who may have the opportunity to study it there, which the more part of those whom we would interest have not. Museums and collections have their use, for much would be lost if they were not. But after all they are necessary evils. They are the melancholy hospitals of the houseless orphans of art; and nothing ought to be removed to one of them so long as it has a native home of its own in which it may safely dwell.

Modern architecture is not a subject which concerns us as antiquaries, but I may be allowed to say a few words about it, insomuch as it affects the old buildings. One of the charges we bring against the "restorers" is that they deliberately strive to make their modern alterations such as may pass for old work, and so far as they succeed in their object, they falsify the history of the buildings they treat by making it impossible to distinguish the real old from the forged old, with which it is mixed. Some of the more learned pride themselves on reproducing, not merely the old style, but minute local varieties of style. Now, the effect of all this is not to raise the new work to the dignity of the old, as they seem to think, but to lower the old to that of the new. It has ceased to be old, and become a nineteenth century copy of old, none the less modern because, worked up with the rest, there are parts which really are what the whole pretends to be. Thus the very skill and learning of the architect makes him a greater enemy to the building than even the ignorant and blundering pretenders whose doings have so often disgusted us. They, indeed, defile everything they touch, but if they do leave anything old it is still possible to recognise it for what it is.

If, whilst preserving the past history, we are to carry it on to our time, whatever we do must show itself plainly to be of our time. The old builders in like case had no difficulty, for, as they worked in a traditional and always-changing style, their work dates itself. But the old tradition has long been dead, and we have not yet succeeded in making a new one. I believe that it will come in the end, and that even now we are unconsciously

working towards it. But, meanwhile, each architect must choose a style for his own use. He cannot invent one. No single mind ever did that, nor ever will; and the frightful productions of the few misguided ones who have tried to do so in our time may serve as scarecrows to warn off others. A new style must grow out of what has been before, as all the old ones have done. Originality, when we find it, has not come of seeking, but the artist, having new thoughts to express, has moulded his style into such form as will express them. And so it may be now, if, instead of troubling ourselves about pedantical correctness, and seeking excitement by trying first one style and then another, each man will select one which seems to him best fitted for modern purposes, and will then use it to express his own ideas just as he uses his mother tongue, neither violating recognised rules of grammar on one hand, nor, on the other, hesitating to introduce a new word or phrase where such is necessary to express his thought.

Whatever new work we do in old churches must, as things now are, be in a style which we have learned by the study of old churches. Local varieties of style, too, deserve attention, for they generally have been influenced by the nature of the local materials. Let us use the old freely as a guide, but never re-produce it, and especially not copy in an old building details from its old parts, as has nearly always been done by the "restorers."

An old church often possesses articles which are as much part of its history as the fabric itself. Amongst them the Plate is the most important, and it is also the most of all in danger of being lost when the clergy are ignorant of its value. A good work, therefore, for any society is to instruct them, and our friends of Cumberland and Westmoreland have shewn us a most effectual way of doing it by their publication of a complete account of all the church plate in those counties, and I am glad to say that the example is being followed by other societies, and amongst them by that of the county we are now visiting. They could not do a better work, for nothing will make men value what is in their keeping so much as seeing that others care for it, and the fact that every article is known to be entered in a printed list will be a very strong safeguard against its alienation. Besides which the work of

making the lists is leading to many interesting discoveries. Already it has doubled the number of known examples of mediæval English plate, and more is certain to be found, besides many valuable articles of later date at present unknown. The Bells too have been catalogued in many places, and should be where they are not. The books and papers should be undertaken next; and either with them or with the plate should be noted those miscellaneous articles of moveable property, which churches possess and amongst which are sometimes things of the highest interest. For the making of these lists we can only look to the local societies. And it will find them work for some time to come. But they ought to begin at once, for the destruction which they are intended to stop is going on daily. It is not long since the oldest English chalice known was sold from the church to which it belonged, and only saved from destruction by its fortunately falling under the notice of one of our members. It is now in the British Museum where at least it is safe. But it would have been better to have left it in the church to which it has probably belonged for six or seven centuries.

Men particularly need to be taught the value of these moveable articles, and that they should not be destroyed simply because they are out of fashion or past service. Let them get new and better if they like, it is well they should do so, but let them keep the old for its own sake and the associations which belong to it. The metal of an old chalice is only worth a few shillings which even the poorest parish need not grudge. Such things should not be stowed away out of sight, or left lying about where they are in danger of loss or injury; but carefully preserved in some safe place in the church where they can be seen by those who care to do so. Nor do I see why other antiquities should not be put with them there. I am sure that it is no desecration of an ancient parish church, full of history itself, to add to its other uses that of being the Parish Museum, and so let it extend the protection of its sanctity to those few relics of which, ancient though they be, it is the still living contemporary.